



Is Oneness Pentecostalism a Departure from Biblical Orthodoxy?

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In the landscape of contemporary Christianity, various movements and denominations emerge, each offering distinct interpretations of the faith. Among these, Oneness Pentecostalism stands out for its rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity, a belief central to traditional Christianity. As devout Christians, it is crucial to discern and understand the teachings of such movements, ensuring our faith remains anchored in the truths revealed in Scripture.

Understanding Oneness Pentecostalism

Oneness Pentecostalism, also known as the "Apostolic" or "Jesus Only" movement, traces its roots to the early 20th century Pentecostal revivals in the United States. Its adherents emphasize the unity of God, denying the traditional Christian understanding of the Trinity, which posits God as three distinct persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—in one essence. Instead, Oneness Pentecostals believe in a singular divine being, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the sole manifestation of God.

The core doctrine of Oneness Pentecostalism is that Jesus is the Father and the Holy Spirit, presenting God as a singular entity who reveals Himself in different forms. They assert that Jesus Christ is the manifestation of the one God in the New Testament, encompassing all the fullness of the Godhead ([Colossians 2:9](#)). This view stands in stark contrast to the Trinitarian view that has been the foundation of Christian orthodoxy for centuries.

The Doctrine of the Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity is a cornerstone of orthodox Christian theology. It is encapsulated in the Nicene Creed (325 AD), which states, "*We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth... And in one Lord Jesus Christ... And in the Holy Spirit.*" This belief is rooted in various Scriptural passages:

- **The Great Commission:** Jesus commands His disciples, "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*" ([Matthew 28:19](#), ESV). This verse highlights the distinct roles within the Godhead.
- **The Baptism of Jesus:** At Jesus' baptism, the heavens open, the Spirit descends like a dove, and the Father's voice declares, "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased*" ([Matthew 3:16-17](#), ESV). This event depicts the simultaneous presence of all three persons of the Trinity.
- **Paul's Benediction:** The Apostle Paul blesses the Corinthians with, "*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all*" ([2 Corinthians 13:14](#), ESV). This further supports the distinct personhood within the Godhead.

The Heretical Nature of Oneness Pentecostalism

The rejection of the Trinity by Oneness Pentecostalism places it outside the bounds of orthodox Christianity. This stance has been widely condemned as heretical by various Christian denominations, including Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and most Protestant churches. The early church fathers, including Tertullian and Athanasius, vigorously defended the Trinitarian doctrine against similar heresies, such as Modalism and Arianism.

Oneness Pentecostalism teaches that God operated in different forms or modes at different times—sometimes as the Father, sometimes as the Son, and sometimes as the Holy Spirit. This modalistic view is contradicted by passages like [Matthew 3:16-17](#), where all three Persons of the Godhead are present simultaneously. The early church strongly contended against the view that God is strictly a singular person who acted in different forms at different times. They argued from Scripture that the tri-unity of God is evident in that more than one Person of the Godhead is often seen simultaneously, and they often interact with one another (examples: [Genesis 1:26](#); [3:22](#); [11:7](#); [Psalm 2:7](#); [104:30](#); [110:1](#); [Matthew 28:19](#); [John 14:16](#)).

Implications for Believers

Oneness Pentecostalism's deviation from the Trinitarian doctrine has significant theological and practical implications:

1. **Christ's Mediatorial Role:** The New Testament presents Jesus as the mediator between God and humanity ([1 Timothy 2:5](#)). By denying the distinct personhood of Jesus, Oneness theology undermines His unique mediatorial role.
2. **The Work of the Holy Spirit:** Traditional Christianity understands the Holy Spirit as a distinct person who guides, comforts, and empowers believers ([John 14:26](#), [Acts 1:8](#)). Oneness theology's view of the Spirit as merely a mode of God can diminish the experiential and relational aspects of the Holy Spirit's work in believers' lives.
3. **Salvation and Baptism:** Oneness Pentecostals often stress the necessity of baptism "*in Jesus' name*" rather than the Trinitarian formula. This can lead to confusion about the nature of salvation and the proper understanding of baptism.

The Theological Debate

Proponents of Oneness Pentecostalism argue that their beliefs are rooted in a deep and sincere desire to honor the unity and sovereignty of God. They contend that the Trinity doctrine is not explicitly stated in the Bible and that the Oneness perspective more accurately reflects the scriptural witness of the one true God. They often cite passages such as [Deuteronomy 6:4](#), "*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one,*" to support their view of God's oneness.

However, the vast majority of Christian denominations and scholars maintain that Oneness Pentecostalism, with its rejection of the Trinity, is a heretical and unbiblical belief system. The concept of the tri-unity of God, while not easily grasped by the finite human mind, is present throughout Scripture. Christians have come to accept that God's nature is not subject to the limitations we might like to put on Him. As [Isaiah 55:8-9](#) reminds us, "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the LORD. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*"

Historical Context and Early Church Response

Modalism, the precursor to Oneness theology, was condemned as heretical as early as the second century A.D. Early church fathers argued from Scripture that the tri-unity of God is evident in that more than one Person of the Godhead is often seen simultaneously, and they often interact with one another. These early theological battles helped to shape and define the orthodox Christian understanding of the Trinity. The Council of Nicaea in 325 AD was a pivotal moment in this theological debate. The Nicene Creed affirmed the Trinitarian doctrine, stating that Jesus Christ is "*God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father.*" This creed was a response to various heretical views, including Modalism, and has since been a cornerstone of Christian orthodoxy.

In a time when doctrinal clarity is vital, Christians must remain vigilant, grounding their faith in the Bible's teachings and the historic creeds of the church. The Apostle Paul's exhortation to Timothy is particularly relevant: "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" ([1 Timothy 4:16](#), ESV). Engaging with Oneness Pentecostals with love and respect is essential, seeking to gently correct and guide them towards the truth ([2 Timothy 2:24-25](#)). As we contend for the faith ([Jude 1:3](#)), let us do so with humility, always prepared to give an answer for the hope that is in us, yet with gentleness and respect ([1 Peter 3:15](#)).

Conclusion

Oneness Pentecostalism's rejection of the Trinity represents a significant departure from core Christian beliefs. By understanding and upholding the doctrine of the Trinity, Christians can protect the integrity of their faith and provide a clear, biblical witness to those influenced by this movement. In doing so, we honor the fullness of God's revelation in Scripture and maintain the unity of the faith handed down through the centuries. As Christians, it is crucial that we remain vigilant in upholding the fundamental doctrines of the faith, while also exercising compassion and understanding towards those who may hold differing theological perspectives. The nature of God is a profound mystery that finite human minds cannot fully comprehend, but we can trust that the biblical witness of the triune God is true, even if we cannot fully explain it.

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